



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Analysis: Wang Yang's visit shows China framing Tibet as national security issue

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- China officially framing Tibetan activism as national security issue both for Chinese and foreign audiences, indicating a decision likely adopted at the secretive seventh Tibet Work Forum in August 2020.
- Chinese state media discourse on Wang Yang's recent visit to Kanlho (Chinese: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture varies substantially for domestic and foreign audiences. Details on instructions on implementing centrally formulated policies left out in Xinhua English for international image projection. Choice of word ("struggle" or "combat") against Tibetan activism significantly different depending on the audience.
- Wang Yang's recent visit to Kanlho is his 10th, combining all his summer and fall visits to the Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas outside the TAR.
- Per visit pattern, Wang Yang will most likely visit the TAR in the fall before the 20th Party Congress later this year.

Analysis of Chinese state media discourse on Wang Yang's visit to Kanlho Tibetan area

Wang Yang, one of the seven Politburo standing committee members of the Chinese Communist Party and chairperson of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, visited Tibetan areas incorporated in Kansu (Gansu) province from May 25-28, 2022. This was his second visit to Kanlho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and his 10th visit overall to the Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas outside the TAR since his appointment as the conference Chairperson in March 2018. As the Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of the United Front and Chairman of the conference, Wang Yang's visit is important as he directs China's Central Committee Tibet Work Coordination Group.

Framing national security

Chinese state media discourse on his two visits to Kanlho has undergone shifts in terms of framing the Tibet issue and freedom activism when the 2018 and 2022 visits are compared. State media carrying messages by Wang Yang to "combat" (choice of word for foreign audience) or "struggle" (choice of word for domestic audience) against "separatist activities" is a staple in Chinese state media discourse. But unlike the visit in 2018, the "combat" or "struggle," depending on the audience, is framed in terms of national security during his recent visit instead of development and stability, as in the past. This is consistent in terms of messaging for both the domestic and foreign audiences. For instance, Chinese state media outlet Xinhua reported in English that "Wang underscored greater efforts to combat separatist activities and rely closely on people of all ethnic groups to forge an ironclad shield for national security" during his May 2022 visit. In comparison, during his May 2018 visit, Xinhua Chinese reported that he instructed to "carry out in-depth anti-separatist struggle ... to achieve sustainable and healthy economic and social development and long-term stability in Tibetan areas."

The shift toward national security framing is consistent with the political developments in China in recent years. During his speech in Lhasa in August 2021 to mark the “70th anniversary of the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet,” Wang said “we should enhance harmony and stability in Tibet and ensure national security and stability in the border areas.” That articulation likely follows a decision made during the seventh Tibet Work Forum held in August 2020 to frame the issue of Tibet in terms of China’s national security.

China under President Xi Jinping had been steadily turning toward building an all-encompassing national security framework as first indicated in the communique of the Third Plenum of the Eighteenth Party Congress in 2013. With the institutionalization of the “Central National Security Commission” and adoption of the “Overall National Security Concept” in 2014, the unveiling of the National Security Strategy in 2015 and legislation of national security regulations and laws, a decision seems to have been reached during the secretive seventh Tibet Work Forum in August 2020 to frame the Tibet issue in terms of national security. Wang Yang’s articulation of “ensuring national security and stability in the border areas” in August 2021 and the Chinese state media quoting Wang’s instruction to “combat separatist activities ... to forge an iron clad shield for national security” during his recent visit to Kanlho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture indicate a policy formulation to equate the Tibet issue with China’s national security.

Differences in state media handouts

True to the fact that Chinese messaging is known to be tailored to different audiences, the details of Wang Yang’s visit to Kanlho vary significantly in English and Chinese state media handouts. While Xinhua English only reported that Wang Yang noted “promotion of interactions, exchanges and integration among all ethnic groups,” Xinhua Chinese carried details of what that meant under the rubric of “national unity and religious harmony” and “national security and social security.” According to Xinhua Chinese, during his visit Wang stressed the consolidation of the consciousness of the Chinese nation’s community, standardization of Mandarin, Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism, abiding by the state-promulgated regulations on religion, deepening the mechanisms to control Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, strengthening teams of party officials, government cadres and religious figures to adapt Tibetan Buddhism for a socialist society, industrializing rural areas, modernizing, and abiding by state-led ecological and environment protection.

Xinhua Chinese also carried Wang Yang’s instructions to the local leadership to implement policies formulated by the central leadership in Beijing during his visit to Kanlho. According to Xinhua Chinese, “He emphasized that it is necessary to thoroughly study, understand and implement the spirit of the Central Ethnic Work Conference, the National Religious Work Conference and the Seventh Central Tibet Work Symposium, fully implement the party’s strategy for governing Tibet in the new era.” The details on the centrally developed policies and call for implementation are missing in the English handout.

Ten visits

Wang Yang’s recent visit to Kanlho is his second to Kanlho and 10th visit overall combining all his visits to the TAR and Tibetan areas outside the TAR. Since his latest summer visit is outside the TAR, per the visit pattern, he is likely to visit the TAR in fall before the 20th Party Congress toward the end of the year.

Below is a summary of Wang’s visits to Tibet:

- May 25-28, 2022, visited Kashue Village in Tsonnyin (Gahai) Town in Luchu (Luqu) county and Draggamngang Village in Yiwa Town in Thewo (Diebu) County in Kanlho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu
- Aug. 18-20, 2021, visited Lhasa (Lasa), Nagchu City, Tibet Autonomous Region
- Sept. 14-15, 2020, visited Machen (Maqin) county in Golok (Guolou) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Xining, Qinghai

- July 6-8, 2020, visited Shigatse (Rikatse) and Lhasa (Lasa), Tibet Autonomous Region
- Aug. 19-21, 2019, visited Purang (Burang) and Tsadha (Zhada) counties in Ngari (Ali) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region
- July 16-17, 2019, visited Kumbum (Taer) monastery and Yushul (Yushu), Qinghai
- May 25-27, 2019, visited Serta (Seda) and Dartsedo (Kangding) in Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan
- Oct 15-16, 2018, visited Gyalthang (Xianggelila) town, Takchonggag (Hutiaoxia) town and Dechen, Yunnan
- Aug. 24-26, 2018, visited Nyingtri (Linzi), Lhokha (Shannan) and Chamdo (Changdu), Tibet Autonomous Region
- May 21-23, 2018, visited Manma village in Sangchu (Xiahe) county, and Labrang Monastery in Kanlho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu

Next Premier of China

Multiple Chinese leadership monitoring experts opine that Wang Yang will replace Li Keqiang as the next Premier of China after the 20th Party Congress. He had already been a Vice-Premier between 2013-18, and his seniority level in the party makes him potentially the next Premier before his retirement in 2027. The party leader stepping into his current position will be vital in terms of political developments in Tibet. And that leader is current Politburo Standing Committee member Zhao Leji, according to norms analysis by Jonathan Brookfield of Tufts University.



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